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ABSTRACT

The suggestopedic model of accelerated learning as developed by Lozanov is referred to by him as a set of attitudes inherent to sociocultural behavior common to the Soviet Bloc countries. The theoretical base accounts for a built-in obedience reflex, acceptance of authority, lack of competitiveness, promotion of collective growth, and a noncritical attitude. This discussion catalogs the varieties of suggestopedia used in Soviet Bloc countries and examines the theoretical basis. This theoretical base and its relevance to the socialist environment are contrasted with the sociocultural environments prevalent in the Western Bloc countries. Generally, it could be said that Lozanov's perception of the collective growth of the class and of the individual's total acceptance of the teacher's authority and methodology do not fit with Western educational philosophy. Another type of accelerated learning examined is hypnosis and inducement of altered states of consciousness. While a heterosuggestive approach can be beneficial to the individual, fear of its use may limit its applicability to Western situations. A third way to accelerated learning is inducement of alpha state of consciousness to foster intuitive learning through the use of relaxation exercises and appropriate musical selections. It is claimed that a selective use of suggestopedic practices can be accepted in the West. (AMH)

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SOCIO-CULTURAL ENVIRONMENTS AND SUGGESTOPEDIA

(A paper presented at the First International Symposium on Accelerated Learning, State University of Rio de Janeiro, Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, January 17, 1983.)

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A B S T R A C T

An investigation into the theoretical basis of suggestopedia -- the principle of authority, psychological "weakening" of the student, collective growth vs. individual achievement, intuitive learning, and the hypnotic element of heterosuggestion -- within the context of contrasting socio-cultural environments: communist and capitalist systems.

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I N T R O D U C T I O N

The advent of Lozanov's suggestopedia has stimulated worldwide attention to devising teaching strategies to accelerate learning. Lozanov is singled out and cited so frequently because he is the one theoretician who has consistently tested his hypotheses, continually modifying and refining his method. Because of this, the seminal work of Lozanov cannot be ignored in developing any accelerated learning program. However, there are more than one technique for accelerating learning, and suggestopedia cannot be taken for gospel. In fact, apart from the Canadian government programs, fidelity to Lozanov's approach is not characteristic of Western experimentation on suggestopedia. Some researchers have departed so completely from the Bulgarian development that their teaching models cannot be considered suggestopedic. This infidelity to Lozanov's outline of suggestopedia is often blamed for the disparity between the spectacular results claimed by the Soviet Block and much more modest improvement in learning and retention

demonstrated in American experiments. In other words, teaching rituals rather than the underlying philosophy of suggestology are considered at fault.

If, on the other hand, one were to examine the theoretical model of the approach -- as it was developed by Lozanov and other East European methodologists -- one could perhaps begin to evaluate suggestopedia in terms of its applicability to non-communist environments. The model, which remains constant inspite of ever-changing teaching strategies, is referred to by Lozanov as a set of "attitudes," inherent to socio-cultural behavior common to the Soviet Block countries. These attitudes include a built-in obedience reflex, acceptance of authority, lack of competitiveness, promotion of collective growth, and a non-critical attitude. Lozanov's theoretical basis also includes an unquestionable acceptance of information promulgated by the government or by any recognized authority, such as a mentor/teacher, on any given subject, e.g., the superiority of intuitive over cognitive learning and/or the importance of heterosuggestion in generating hypermnesia.

The purpose of this paper is (a) to catalogue accelerated learning techniques used in the Soviet Block; (b) examine the theoretical foundation of Lozanov's suggestopedia and its applicability (if any) to non-communist environments, and (c) offer a position on the probability of the method's

success in the West, with some of the pedagogical variables either omitted or modified. Both the theoretical and applied components of suggestopedia will be discussed against the background of Western attitudes toward the individual within society.

TYPES OF ACCELERATED LEARNING

Suggestopedia is only one of several accelerated learning techniques which may include learning under hypnosis, through genetic manipulation or mechanical brain stimulation, in response to either pleasure or pain, or any other strong emotion, or through a combination of various accelerative techniques.

Mira Vaisburg (1981) of the Soviet Academy of Pedagogical Sciences lists four accelerated learning modes used in the Soviet Block in an article entitled "High Speed Language Learning."

Hypnopaedia -- or teaching during natural sleep. The lesson, which is first presented in a regular forty-five minute class, is placed on tape. The student listens to the tape for fifteen minutes before falling asleep; he continues to hear it for another fifty-five minutes, played progressively softer. Some thirty minutes before the morning alarm rings, the tape begins to replay the lesson, getting progressively louder.

Rhythmopaedia -- or teaching during induced sleep, in a classroom or a laboratory equipped with an electro-hypnotic apparatus. Information is imparted by varying degrees of frequency of light and sound impulses (rotating circles, flashing lights, fluctuating sounds), in order to maintain, says Vaisburg, the depth and intensity of hypnotic inhibition in the student.

Suggestopaedia -- or teaching while the students are awake, imparting information to persons in a state of mental relaxation achieved through various means, such as Baroque music, yoga breathing, visualization, muscular relaxation, and desuggestive-suggestive behavior of the teacher (which may include hypnotic intoning of suggestions during the passive concert phase and fluctuations in pace and volume in dialogue presentations referred to by Lozanov as "horizontal" and "vertical swings.")

Relaxopaedia -- or teaching while the students are awake, imparting information to persons in a state of relaxation (pseudopassiveness) achieved through the same means as those used in suggestopaedia minus heterosuggestion.

All four modes of learning, says Vaisburg, trigger more selective attention and inhibit sensory perceptions not pertinent to the information presented during this particular instructional phase.

Since the term "suggestopedia" is used much more often

than the other three terms by those interested in accelerated instruction, it is reasonable to assume that some Western educators indeed believe they are using suggestopedia, although with some modifications. In reality, more often than not, they simply (and happily) apply the term "suggestopedia" to the most innocuous methodology of the four listed above, namely that of relaxopedia, or a variation of relaxopedia.

SUGGESTOPEDIA AS AN ATTITUDE

Let us examine suggestopedia's theoretical basis as it was developed by Lozanov. Suggestopedia is not a technique, maintains Lozanov, but rather an attitude (Lozanov's statement does not deny the importance of certain teaching strategies; it emphasizes the importance of the underlying theoretical construct of the method). According to Lozanov (1973), the student in a suggestopedic class must display the following behavior. He must:

1. become "weakened" psychologically in order to develop trust in his mentor and accept his authority;
2. become amenable to suggestions (as result of his weakening);
3. accept rigid discipline (presumably in and out of the classroom), and
4. contribute continuously to the collective growth

of the class rather than "harmfully" competing with his peers.

None of the preceding attitudes are stressed in the West because they are not what Western educators consider appropriate in our culture. Let us examine these attitudes one by one.

The principle of authority and heterosuggesion are predominent in suggestopedia. The student is said to be "desuggested" of his inhibitions (or reprogrammed) by his instructor/mentor who utilizes every possible device to relax the student mentally so that he becomes amenable to incoming suggestions. Then the instructor projects into the student's mind -- either by direct commands or subtle suggestions -- the following ideas:

1. the teacher is the supreme authority on the subject under investigation;

2. the subject is valuable and/or useful, and

3. the student can and will learn effortlessly and retain new information for a long period of time.

Western attempts to accelerate learning have stressed only one type of teacher authority: that which comes from "within." This kind of authority is based on the teacher's mastery of subject matter, and the acknowledgment of this mastery by his students. It is a very important part of Lozanov's suggestopedia, but only a part. Another type of

authority is that of the position, or rank, of the instructor, who, according to Lozanov, is "never wrong." His word is final; he is not questioned by his students, let alone challenged. He remains aloof and formal outside of the classroom, although during socio-dramas, he may be "the life of the party." This is the authority which comes from "above." Obviously, it is effective since it has survived the rigor of testing and remains today one of the theoretical components of Lozanov's system. Furthermore, it does not conflict with the communist way of life. In fact, it reinforces it.

Suggestology cannot be either researched or applied in a vacuum. Delores Schaefer reports in "My Experiences with the Lozanov Method" (1980), that it is Lozanov's contention that suggestology's aim is to study the human personality in its interrelations with the environment. Thus, it is natural to infer that Lozanov was working within the context of his own, socialist environment.

In the Soviet Block, where regimentation, obedience, and almost blind belief in authority are common, and where mass media is maintaining the desired political climate rather successfully, the authority figure ordering modifications of student behavior is normally accepted. After all, people are conditioned to accept suggestions on all strata of their social milieu. In other words, susceptibility to

suggestion is an integral part of Soviet societal behavior. A. G. Kovalev of Leningrad State Institute of Culture writes in "An Experiment in Reshaping the Personality of a High School Student" (1976), that ". . .habitual acceptance of the authority of his elders helps the student to accept their suggestions." (p. 240)

Another researcher, D. Lehman (1973), of Karl Marx Institute in Leipzig, East Germany, does not fail to establish a relationship between the method and the socio-political system of the Soviet Block by concluding that suggestopedia makes better Soviet citizens.

N. Shipkovensky, in "Limits and Dangers of Suggestions" (1975), contends that suggestions will be inhibited by an individual with a higher degree of mental development, creative ability, and individualism. (This is an indirect way to equate the success of suggestopedia with the absence of individualism.)

The attitudes discussed above are non-compatible with the socio-cultural environments prevalent in our classrooms. The concept of authority (as the Soviet educators view it), heterosuggestion, and above all, the concept of personality reshaping, do not sit well with Western educational tradition. A great deal of resistence could be expected if we were to introduce unexpurgated suggestopedia of the Soviet Block into classrooms in Western Block countries.

Moreover, if we were to accept Shipkovensky's point of view, the individualism that characterizes the free world might preclude, or at least hamper, automatic acceptance of heterosuggestion from any figure of authority, thereby inhibiting the effectiveness of learning under suggestion.

It should be mentioned at this point that throughout the years Lozanov has been modifying his techniques, confusing and annoying his followers in the process. Some have felt that these changes have been prompted by Lozanov's search for more productive classroom techniques -- hence, modifications in class time, materials and their sequence of presentation, musical selections, classroom environment, breathing techniques, and so forth. Yet, Lozanov's theoretical basis, his "attitudes," have remained pretty much constant although one could argue that he has been (and still is) searching for a better balance between desired results and means used to obtain them. In other words, "How much acceleration and at what price?"

Lozanov's perception of the collective growth of the class as an essential principle of suggestopedia may or may not receive wholehearted approval in the West. Earl Stevick of the U.S. Foreign Service Language Institute advances in Teaching Languages: A Way and Ways (1980), his view of an American language classroom as being an "arena" where individuals meet and fight for supremacy, for their

own psychological survivals, for their own universes held together by deeply-ingrained cultural concepts, rules of speech, and learning styles. From the onset, says Stevick, the psychological mood of such a classroom is not conducive to pleasant learning.

The concern with the collective growth of the class rather than with that of the individual may be viewed as a positive philosophy if its application diminishes exaggerated self-concern and its corollaries: self-pity, the feeling of inadequacy and of not being in control. Lozanov's collective growth could be compared to the Western concept of "team work," which has been acclaimed by Western societies as a positive outcome of group behavior.

Finally, whereas Lozanov advocates avoidance of competition, which he considers harmful, Western educators encourage competition in games, spelling bees, posters, projects, and other activities. In fact, competition is one of the basic tents of the capitalist system, and classroom instruction is not exempt from its influence.

On the basis of the four attitudes prescribed by Lozanov for a suggestopedic class, one should be able to perceive the image of an ideal East European suggestopedic student whose psychological strength is weakened to make him receptive to heterosuggestions, and who unselfishly contributes to the growth of his class and dutifully resists

being competitive.

Does this image fit an American student as we know him today? Hardly. Does an approach based on these attitudes fit in our educational philosophy. Not on a wide scale, although it might prove useful and appropriate for a group of consenting adults who must, at all cost, master a large body of knowledge in the shortest span of time possible.

THE HYPNOTIC VARIABLE

Although this paper does not propose to resolve the on-going dispute whether suggestopedia and hypnosis induce essentially the same altered state of consciousness, it will touch on certain aspects of this controversy.

Evidence indicates a similarity of the two consciousness states. For example, C. T. Tart defines light hypnosis in Altered States of Consciousness (1969), as a relaxed state of wakefullness, accompanied by receptivity to suggestion, with alpha brain waves as the dominent electrical pattern. Moreover, his study establishes a direct relationship between the light hypnotic state and intellective alertness and hypermnesia (which characterize suggestopedia). Descriptions of the suggestopedic state found throughout Lozanov's works parallel closely the observations recorded by Tart in his studies of hypnosis.

Stanton (1978), confirms the similarity between hypnosis and suggestopedia by comparing hypnotherapy procedures with the three phases of the suggestopedic teaching presentation:

1. the preparation phase -- the student/patient is being prepared for positive expectancy with mental and physical relaxation, rhythmic breathing and visualization of pleasant experiences;

2. the presentation phase -- characterized by concentration of the student/patient on non-related objects, e.g., music in suggestopedia or backward counting in hypnotherapy, and

3. the practice phase -- Lozanov's sociodramas are similar in their effect to that produced by group therapy encounters.

Lozanov is very reluctant to admit the existence of a hypnotic element in suggestopedia. Yet a great deal of forceful suggestion is offered in suggestopedic classes a la Lozanov. E. A. M. Robinett, in her doctoral dissertation "The Effects of Suggestopedia in Increasing Foreign Language Achievement" (1975), models her deprogramming exercise on Lozanov's pre-instructional techniques. The following is an excerpt from Robinett's deprogramming model:

> To begin these exercises, assume a position with both feet flat on the floor.

> Deep, regular breathing will help you. . . Let your eyelids close. . . and repeat to yourself. . . Every day, I am getting better and better. . . My mind moves effectively. . . I am supremely calm. My memory is alert. . . (and so forth). . .At the count of three, let your eyes open, but retain your relaxed state of mind, and listen with great interest and attention. (p. 63)

Very similar content is offered by A. Kovalev (1973), who terms his session hypnotic. Kovalev describes a meeting with a Soviet high school student in need of improvement. A short counseling session, during which Misha (the student) acknowledges his shortcomings and asks for help, is followed, says Kovalev, by "a regular hypnotic session." Misha is told to close his eyes and relax. Then the mentor begins to suggest desired behavior modifications. Excerpts from the mentor's speech are given below:

> Listen carefully! Listen carefully! You are a good boy. You understand that you must do your homework! Always, always, always. . .You will go home, have your dinner, rest a while, and then immediately start on your lessons. . . Tomorrow you will answer well. Answer well! Answer well!

> Repeat after me -- today and always I will do my homework. . . today and always . . .today and always. . . Listen to me: for good behavior and study, we will re-admit you to the Little Pioneer League . . . Your peers will like you. . . You will be happy, happy, happy. . . Open your eyes now. This is all for today. (p. 244)

The resemblance between the two sessions is indisputable.

It must be stressed at this point that a heterosuggestive approach which is wholistically beneficial to the student is, or can be, very valuable, just as is hypnotherapy. Yet, fear of heterosuggestion under hypnosis as a classroom pedagogy will be detrimental to the method. This fear, however supressed, is a negative reinforcement and will reduce the instructor's effectiveness as well as the student's ability to "let go," relax, and learn.

No judgment is made in this article on the ethics of classroom hypnosis, and no definite position is taken on whether hypnosis is indeed a component of suggestopedia. This writer can only state that one must not bar the possibility of light hypnosis being induced in a suggestopedic class. Keeping this in mind, the instructor then could select either to use or not use suggestopedia.

THE CONCEPT OF INTUITIVE LEARNING

Another stumbling block in accepting suggestopedia in the West is the attitude toward the concept of intuitive learning. Whereas in Western philosophy, explains I. K. Taimni in The Science of Yoga (1974), intuition is often equated with the absence of reasoning, in yogic philosophy (on which suggestopedia is partially based), intuition is viewed as a transcendent faculty of perception which dispenses with the use of customary cognitive sensory paths. Called Pratibha in Hindi, this faculty is direct and instantaneous. It by-passes all learning barriers so often referred to by Lozanov and his followers in describing suggestopedic lessons.

Mircea Eliade, in his work Yoga: Immortality and Freedom (1958), reports on the superiority of intuitive over cognitive learning. According to yogic doctrines, maintains Eliade, intuitive perception is a sub-conscious psychomental activity directed toward either an object or information.

During deprogramming suggestopedic sessions, auditory channels remain open initially in order to activate a "lever" which "switches" cognitive perception to another modality, that of intuitive perception, also referred to as subliminal perception. Visual channels remain inactive during deprogramming sessions when students are asked to

mentate (visualize with eyes closed). Once the intuitive, or subliminal, mode takes hold, all suggestions and/or information are received in wholistic images rather than in linear progression, which is characteristic of cognitive learning, slow, deliberate, and judgmental.

Wilson Bryan Key, in his best-seller Subliminal Seduction (1973), refers to subliminal stimuli and passive receptivity (Lozanov's pseudopassiveness), as having an extraordinary effect upon human perception. Although Key discusses mainly the negative (commercial) aspects of subliminal perception, there is no reason why one could not take advantage of the positive aspects of subliminal learning.

At this juncture in our quest for accelerated learning, we should review our personal attitudes toward altered states of consciousness, heterosuggestion, and the concept of intuition. No method can be successful if the instructor doubts the validity of its theoretical foundations, because if he harbors such doubts, he will subliminally broadcast his lack of conviction and consequently undermine the success of the accelerated teaching.

It must be understood that one cannot obliterate "offensive" theoretical bases of suggestopedia by ignoring them. Heterosuggestion, intuitive perception, and perhaps hypnosis, are part of Lozanov's theoretical construct which was

developed within the confines of a communist socio-cultural environment.

For those who cannot accept suggestopedia in its pure form, relaxopedia seems to be the most desirable alternative. The relaxopedic approach, with alpha state induced through autosuggestion rather than heterosuggestion, can be accepted in the West where the latest findings in the field of brain research and the popularity of the biofeedback experiments have lent an aura of respectability to this type of research.

Relaxopedia does not offend. It does not call for sophisticated hardware or comfortable sleeping accomodations. Above all, it does not rely heavily on either the principle of authority (as perceived by East European methodologists), or on heterosuggestion which in the Western world is often equated with "brainwashing," and shied away from by Western educators who view it as a negative and possibly dangerous mode of instruction. Relaxopedia relies mostly on a type of autosuggestion described by Elmer and Alyce Green (1977), in their experiments conducted at the Menninger Clinic in Topeka, Kansas. It was noted that students were able to self-induce a state of "reverie," which through routine practice, enabled them to improve their self-images and accelerate substantially their acquisition of new knowledge.

PROCEDURAL VARIABLES

Lozanov's procedural variables, although modified from time to time, remain more constant than the variables used by American practitioners. Some of the American innovations are listed below.

Musical selections -- selections from classical Baroque music, largo movements, are being replaced with selections from modern Baroque, Halpern music, popular music, and in some cases, no music at all.

Yoga breathing -- is either omitted or modified to a degree where the yoga rhythm becomes no longer recognizable.

Class duration -- the traditional three-hour class is scaled down to accommodate individual schedules.

Classroom environment -- lights are bright rather than dimmed as in the Lozanov experiments; classrooms are often noisy; chairs are uncomfortable; the environment in general is non-conducive to inducing alpha state, that state of consciousness which is essential to accelerate learning.

Materials -- very few American educators use traditional Lozanov-design materials, creating instead their own, or adapting the existing textbooks to their own versions of accelerated lessons.

Sequence of presentation -- fluctuates from experiment

to experiment.

Teacher training -- whereas suggestopedic teachers from the Soviet Block are trained in drama and voice, their American counterparts are not. Thus their respective pedagogies are per force dissimilar.

How do these alterations affect the outcome of suggestopedic experiments in the West? It is the opinion of this writer that since hypermnesia is achieved when electrical activity of the brain is slowed to alpha state, and since alpha state is induced mainly through such devices as appropriate musical selections and yoga rhythmic breathing, these procedural variables must be considered the most important ones in any classroom where substantial hypermnesia is expected. Their omission will affect the success of a suggestopedic session.

When alpha state is achieved and successfully maintained, the remaining variables become less important. If, however, no alpha state is achieved, then the teacher's behavior, classroom environment, materials, and so forth, will become crucial, just as they are in non-suggestopedic classrooms.

C O N C L U S I O N

Controversy is likely to be stirred wherever suggestopedia is used, or even discussed. This controversy reflects the value system of the society to which suggestopedic concepts and practices have been introduced. The method itself is neither intrinsically good or evil. Ethics of suggestopedia are determined by the motives of those who control the experiments. The new practitioner of suggestopedia should expect to encounter some resistance to his methodology, and be prepared to counter raised arguments. He also should realize that successful adaption of suggestopedia requires thorough knowledge of its theoretical basis, and that certain phases, namely those used to induce alpha state, may not be omitted if significant results are expected.

Suggestopedia may not be appropriate in every socio-cultural setting. In non-communist systems, opposition to some of its philosophies or techniques may preclude its use. For every situation, however, there is a pedagogy of accelerated learning which will satisfy both the student and society. If the effectiveness of the chosen method is less striking than that of suggestopedia a la Lozanov, let us accept this as the price to be paid for selecting a system on the basis of our own preferred "attitudes".

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